

# PERSONAL IDEALS

R. DIMSDALE STOCKER

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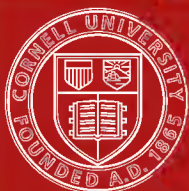
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## PERSONAL IDEALS



# PERSONAL IDEALS

OR

MAN AS HE IS AND MAY  
BECOME

BY

R. DIMSDALE STOCKER

AUTHOR OF "SUB-CONSCIOUSNESS," "CLUES TO CHARACTER," "NEW  
THOUGHT MANUALS," "PSYCHIC MANUALS," "SEERSHIP AND  
PROPHECY," "SPIRIT, MATTER AND MORALS," ETC.

"Man partly is and wholly hopes to be."—R. BROWNING.

LONDON

L. N. FOWLER & CO.

7 IMPERIAL ARCADE, LUDGATE CIRCUS, E.C.

NEW YORK

FOWLER & WELLS CO., 18 EAST 22ND STREET

1909

1909

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## PREFATORY NOTE



THE scope and purpose of this book are sufficiently indicated by the title as to render anything in the way of a lengthy preface unnecessary. I may, however, point out that my aim in writing it has been not so much to be didactic, as suggestive; and thereby to send the reader, whoever he may be, to the facts of life for enlightenment. Whether I have succeeded or no, the reader must decide for himself. But at least it is my hope that he will alight upon some thought here and there, however imperfectly it may be expressed, that will be the means of leading him to search his own soul.

R. D. S.



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## I

### WHITMAN'S "SONG OF MYSELF"

BEHIND every line, I had almost said, behind every syllable, that he has written, lurks the personality of Walt Whitman himself. And what an imposing, impressive personality it is, to be sure, that we have before us!

In that incomparable prose essay which may be found in the more recent edition of his poetical works, which bears for its title "A Backward Glance o'er Travelled Roads," Whitman expressly points out that his aim, from first to last, was mainly to put a person, a human being, none other than his very self, freely, fully and truly on record. And how wondrously he succeeded in his attempt, all who are familiar with the volume, "Leaves of Grass," will be in a position to judge.

Well might he exclaim—as he did in one of his fugitive fragments—"Camerado, this is no book; who touches this touches a man." It is

in this assertion of his own inherent individuality (for better, for worse, whatever its merits, whatever its defects), that lends to the whole work its characteristic charm, uniqueness and fascination. And the thought strikes one, how seldom it is that a writer is thus visible in his compositions!

There are any number of books which one picks up that are altogether found wanting in this respect. They leave one in a state of bewilderment, uncertainty and suspense as regards their authorship. Almost anybody might have written them. In spite of the fact that these books are often attributed to writers who have achieved popularity and fame, and who may even possess talent and culture, they yet possess no distinctive individuality of their own. There are books which one comes across which might almost be supposed to have written themselves. Such books, it is true, may not be destitute of certain literary merit. They may give evidence of consummate technical skill on the part of their writers. Yet they produce, upon the whole, what may be described as a wholly negative impression upon the reader—inasmuch as they leave him unmoved, and fail to touch a single responsive chord in his breast. They neither stir nor convince. They do not, in short, communicate to one that subtle electric impulse without which the effort of

any writer must be abortive. I venture to believe that, in these times, with the enormous multiplication of volumes dealing with every variety of subject, these works are in an overwhelming majority. Very rarely indeed is a book that happens to achieve even some measure of popularity destined to outlive its generation. An exception must, however, now and then be made. And a case in point is afforded us by Whitman.

Here was a writer who, from the first, succeeded, at least in part, in impressing himself upon his age. Under his spell came some of the rarest and most delicately nurtured minds of his time. And although he has come into his own, like many another, only after his death, even while he yet lived he contrived to reach a tolerably extensive and enthusiastically admiring public. Nor is the reason obscure. If, as Ernest Renan alleges, the mass has no voice but can only feel and stammer, it is not slow to interpret the utterances of its prophets and seers. And it is among such that Whitman may fittingly be included. In him the new order became, for the first time, articulate.

Upon the whole, few books that appeared in the course of the nineteenth century so fully justified their reputation as "Leaves of Grass." Probably even this book does as little justice to its author's

genius as it does to its own theme. Yet its message, as have few, gains in the delivery: every word which it utters appearing to breathe and burn as if it were inscribed, as it doubtless was, with the very fibres of the man's nerves, in the blood of his own heart.

In an eloquent passage included in his prose writings, Whitman has told us what he conceives to be the express function of all true poetry. His words are these: "I say the profoundest service that poems . . . can do for their reader is not merely to satisfy the intellect or supply something polished and interesting, nor even to depict great passions in persons or events, but to fill him with vigorous and clean manliness, religiousness, and give him a *good heart* as a radical possession and habit." His own work assuredly fulfils this condition. It is precisely this spirit which permeates "*Leaves of Grass*." Every line, every phrase—often amounting to no more than some casual ejaculation—seems to quiver and pulsate with emotion kindled at the flame of life. In consequence of which it teems with an intimacy with the problems of human existence, to which only the few can pretend.

Of all the poems—chants or recitatives—what you will—which have found a place in this incomparable collection, none proclaims this fact with greater



emphasis or more consummate confidence than the "Song of Myself." Here, in this poem, we find a veritable confession of the man's attitude in regard to life; a summary and declaration of his inmost beliefs, aspirations, hopes and convictions. And the poem, be it observed, is all the more remarkable because it reveals to us one who shared the life with which we are familiar; indeed, it is remarkable just for this reason, and because it throws into forcible relief all the essential factors in our common, everyday experience. Whitman published this poem of his upwards of fifty years ago.\* Like every true seer, however, he lived in advance of his age. More truly than any astrologist or soothsayer could he forestall tendencies; with a swift and unerring intuition he divined approaching events. Almost unconsciously he discovered a world within a world, beheld cosmos in chaos, light in darkness, good in evil, idealism in what passed for materialism, and spirituality in the unmentionable and gross. And with the foresight begotten of a sincerely sympathetic appreciation for his own era, he contrived to construct an entire synthesis of the thought that was destined to replace the current creed of his time. In the case of such a man, nothing is more difficult

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\* The "Song of Myself" appeared in 1855.

to decide than whether he more impressed the thought of his age, or was not more influenced than those about him with the unacknowledged trend in thought and morals. Probably, neither speculation is wide of the mark; but, from whatever cause, Whitman stands pre-eminently for modernity, and may be construed as especially typical of the revolt from a spurious and artificial idealism which centuries of supernaturalism had fostered and left behind them. His advent signalled an attempt to clear the debris entirely from the intellectual and moral regions wherein mankind were left to stagnate. In him the Superman has its spokesman and interpreter.

Thoreau has said that Whitman and democracy are one; and as one proceeds to glance through his self-revelations, one realizes the justice of the comment. The movement which is now spoken of as Social Democracy may indeed appear to proceed independently of Whitman's especial ideals and enthusiasms. Yet, at its core, we may discern the identical objective whence he derived his inspiration. And this seems to me to be all the more significant because, as I interpret the implications of Socialism, we are reaching a stage when we are beginning to realize more and more the value of the individual. In this respect, Whitman was prophetic. Never does he seek to convert life into a mere mechanical con-

trivance, nor does he resort to the clumsy and ineffectual expedient of forcing men into any pre-arranged system or theory of life. Of these, to judge by his own deliverances upon the subject, the world has already had enough and to spare. Nothing, in his eyes, is greater or more infinitely sacred than simple manhood or womanhood. Over this, he will set neither deity, king, priest, president, nor any other ruler. It must become a law unto itself. Divinity itself inheres primarily, if not exclusively, in the single, separate person. Beside this, all else is but as a type, a symbol, a myth, and as such, destined to pass into oblivion when its turn has been served.

To be apprehended aright, the "Song of Myself" must needs be regarded as an appeal to the individualistic sentiment. It is sublime in its egoism. It is addressed by the solitary soul to itself: it is Oneself in converse with itself. It ignores everything but ego-am-ity. "It is you talking just as much as myself. I act as the tongue of you. Tied in your mouth, in mine it begins to be loosened."

The opening words, which announce this central thought, are these:—

"I celebrate myself, and sing myself,  
And what I assume you shall assume,  
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.

Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the  
origin of all poems,

You shall possess the good of the earth and sun, (there are  
millions of suns left,)

You shall no longer take things at second or third hand,  
nor look through the eyes of the dead, nor feed on the  
spectres in books,

You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things  
from me,

You shall listen to all sides and filter them from your self."

From such a passage, one may immediately perceive the main standpoint. The individual is everything: its possibilities are all but infinite. And, as he proceeds to develop this conception, we find a surpassing example of self-universalization—in which the self, instead of being abstracted by a process of philosophic speculation, is identified with the whole cosmos.

Primarily, no doubt, the purport of the "Song of Myself" is autobiographical. There are many references in the poem to the writer. He speaks of himself, for instance, as having reached the age of thirty-seven, and later narrates several incidents, which were undoubtedly founded upon actual facts in his own life.

In these evident allusions to himself, however, the more sympathetic reader will discover little trace of the vulgar bombast and assertion in which self-absorbed natures are liable to indulge. To mistake

his message in this respect is to miss its entire purpose and intention. Whitman is, indeed, all too mindful of this possible misunderstanding not to meet the untoward contingency. "I know," he cries, "perfectly well my own egotism." He is in no wise ashamed "to dote on himself." And, knowing himself to be august, he will not so much as trouble to vindicate himself or waste time with apologies. The "eternal laws," he finds, provide him with an excellent precedent for his policy, and he does not hesitate to avail himself of the opportunity which his book affords him of emulating so admirable an example. He speaks of himself as a Kosmos: as an elemental being, including all things that he finds without him: as "turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking and breeding": no sentimentalist, but giving forth that he is divine, inside and out, making holy whatever he touches or is touched by. "The scent of these armpits" he finds to be "finer aroma than prayer," "this head more than churches, bibles or creeds." The touch is an exceedingly characteristic one. Yet to attribute such outbursts to mere rhetorical bombast or self-conceit would be widely wide of the mark. In truth, with the average egotist, who is content to prate of his own private exploits, Whitman has nothing in common, as every line of his poetry abundantly demonstrates. Empty self-complacency, begotten of

a petty personal vanity, is utterly foreign to his nature and gospel. His standpoint is the very directest antithesis of it. In his eyes, the self-hood of mankind proclaims a concrete, not merely potential, equality between all men. And, applying the principle to himself, he is as good as the rest of them. Though he is not, therefore, at liberty to dominate another, his independence forbids him from yielding his place to any man. In that place he is unique ; he is all-sufficient ; and it is his business to fetch the whole world flush with himself. "If these things," he says in one place, "are not yours as much as they are mine, they are nothing, or next to nothing." It is the man who makes things great. The greatest things in life accrue only through the relationships and adjustments between a man and his environment ; most of all, between man and man. Every man is, in the last resort, his own deliverer and judge ; but isolate him, wrench him from his objective, and what remains of him ? Whitman realizes the value and worth of this modern view. God and eternity even do not exist independent of man. "Men and women are not dots or dreams." They are inexhaustible factors and aims in progress. Indeed, they are progress itself. "How dare you," he says in one place, "place anything before a man ?"

As we follow him, we seem to forget that it is

another who is speaking. So absolutely has he related himself with our moods and feelings, that we seem, temporarily at least, to have transcended the limits of our ordinary selves. And by this, I do not in the least intend to suggest that Whitman is guilty of transporting us, any more than himself, to some dim, shadowy, far-away region. On the contrary, his mission, as he says, is nothing if it is not to bring people back from persistent strayings and sickly abstractions, down to the artless average: the divine, original and concrete.

Never perhaps was a poet so purely concrete as Whitman—what entrances him is the Ever-present, the Nowness of things. Life, full and abundant, is no business for the intellectual gymnast, no pastime for the idle speculator whose will-o'-the-wisps bring him to the verge of mental bankruptcy. Never would he beguile the hours by sighing for the far off, unattained and dim. All that he desires and deserves exists at this immediate instant of time. As he waits and witnesses, he is filled with an indescribable delight. All that lies before him becomes animated. The smoke of his own breath, his inhalation and exhalation, the beatings of his heart, the movements of his lungs, fill him with an indescribable ecstasy. The senses are miracles in his eyes. And his enthusiasm does not cease even here.

He is not satisfied to argue or speculate. He must there and then wonder and admire everything: he includes the whole world in his embrace. "Clear and sweet is my soul, and clear and sweet is all that is not my soul." He is enamoured of "growing out of doors." Whatever is common, cheap, accessible and easy he identifies with himself. Unlike the man who would strive after perfection, he believes the attainments of the ordinary person sufficient for his needs.

And the homeliest facts serve him for types. They are better suited to his purpose than arguments, however subtle. In the sow and her litter, and in the brood of the turkey-hen, he sees in operation the self-same law whose presence he divines within his own heart. A morning glory at his window satisfies him better than all the metaphysics of the scholars. Logic and sermons do not convince him so deeply as the damp of the night. "If you would understand me go to the heights or water shore. The nearest gnat is an explanation, and a drop or motion of waves a key. The maul, the oar, the handsaw, second my words."

Soul and body are consubstantial to Whitman. He will not be at the pains to define and particularise. The vital and mechanical theories do not disturb his imperturbable serenity.



We are to be brought face to face with life as it actually *is*—not only as it is thought about—but with life as it is unconsciously and instinctively realized—physiologically as well as intellectually. He comes to us in order that we may not only exist in some far-away retreat created by our fancy, but that we may enter into the scheme of things as our senses report it to us.

And more and more, as I reflect upon it, do I realize the urgency for accepting Whitman's point of view. We have only too often belittled and degraded this "common life." And not only have we consciously been guilty of doing this for ourselves, we have unconsciously thrown contempt upon it for others. In Whitman's eyes, this world of ours, even as it is, is by no means the worst of all possible places.

At the same time his outlook, so far from contemplating the actual to the exclusion of the super-sensible, at once suggests to us what an infinitely grander and more inspiring affair life would become if we could so enter into it as to make our hopes and enjoyments, and chances and opportunities a mutual matter. The commonest of facts—a sweet, clean, healthy body; a sufficiency of sunlight, fresh air, and wholesome food; and enough employment and leisure to lend a zest to living,—these he would tell

us should satisfy any man. And how wondrously sane is his verdict! Yet, as one ponders the matter, one asks oneself, how many members of our civilized community secure these things as their portion? Whose existence is not choked up with the weeds of care, anxiety, love of riches, and worldly ambition? Not that these things are worthless, but he finds that there are weightier matters which must adjust the balance before life can appear under its more becoming aspect.

No natural process, it is almost needless to say, is too coarse for treatment in his eyes. None becomes an occasion of abhorrence or contempt. No physiological law incurs his censure or disdain, and he even appears to be convinced that the experience of evil is as inevitable and necessary as the experience of its contrary, good.

In his "Song of Myself," for instance, Whitman seems ready to accept pain and suffering as the educators of man. And it is this magnificent optimism which is perhaps his finest moral attribute. He cannot bring himself to exclude even evil. The scheme would not be perfect apart from it. It is true that he holds man implicitly accountable for this; but, inasmuch as a knowledge of evil points the way to better things, so it becomes, in its turn, divinely appointed. So stout is his faith, that he

somehow feels it to be a means to an eternal end. His biographer, Dr. Maurice Bucke, tells us that Whitman disclosed an almost total inability to feel evil himself. This may be gathered from the following passage, which occurs in the Author's work "Cosmic Consciousness." "I believe all the poet's senses are exceptionally acute, his hearing especially so; no sound or modulation of sound perceptible to others escapes him, and he seems to hear many things that to ordinary folk are inaudible. I have heard him speak of hearing the grass grow and the trees coming out in leaf." Yet "his cheeks are round and smooth, his face has no lines expressive of care, or weariness, or age. The habitual expression of his face is repose; but there is a well-marked firmness and decision.

"I have never seen his look, even momentarily, express contempt or any vicious feeling. I have never known him to sneer at any person or thing, or to manifest in any way or degree either alarm or apprehension, though he has in my presence been placed in circumstances that would have caused both in most men. . . . I never knew him to be in a bad temper." "Perhaps," he says, "no man who ever lived liked so many things and disliked so few as Walt Whitman." And so inconceivably comprehensive are his range and grasp, that he can truly

say, as he does, "not an inch or a part of an inch" is vile. It may be doubted whether, since the time when the first chapter of Genesis was written, any writer has pronounced so eulogistic an utterance upon creation.

Yet, as I read these "Leaves" I do not find their writer condoning evil. Responsibility is not non-existent; and if he is at little pains to conceal evil, still less would he justify its commission. Whitman is, in truth, too great to whitewash and extenuate the meannesses and flaws and imperfections which disfigure so many otherwise noble characters. He may, *he does*, see beyond these; even in the most depraved his keen eye detects the beauties which the shadows are a means of throwing into relief. But he never yields to the temptation of gilding vice or making wrong appear right. Human standards may not be eternal. He may detect their weakness and the presumption of those who pin their faith upon them; yet these are nothing to him.

He can witness toil, sin, and sorrow, with equanimity, simply because he feels that man not only has the means, but the will, at his command to surmount such obstacles. His moral sense is of the robustest. He has none of the ethical squeamishness that pertains to less spontaneous natures. Moralist that he is, not a single word suggests the

air of one whose innocence can be injured by unconventional methods. Thus, whilst he believes in good, he believes in it because he must. He cannot help himself. It suits him. He is built to be social. He positively prefers it to being selfish. In association with others he discovers the fullest measure of that liberty which is calculated to secure the well-being of all.

The minutest object to such a man may become a sign-post on the road of life, the most casual circumstance possessing a wholly unsuspected significance for him. In one place he quaintly says:

"The bug and the bull are not worshipped enough,  
Dung and dirt are more admirable than was dreamed."

Such words as these possess a meaning of the deepest psychological order:

"Mine is no callous shell,  
I have instant conductors all over me whether I pass or stop,  
They seize every object and lead it harmlessly through me."

"Whoever degrades another degrades me,  
And whatever is done or said returns at last to me."

In this last sentence, morality has ceased to be a private affair, and has become cosmic. His words suggest that more and more all power may be won on the side of Right. Who shall say that, some day, the universe may not be proved to be under the guidance of the purified and unselfish love of such sublime souls?

For the supernatural, Whitman has literally no use. Dreams and fantasies and fine spun theories regarding the Almighty and the hereafter he dismisses with a shrug of his muscular shoulders. He will not bring himself to speak of commencements and conclusions. Creator and created, soul and body, spiritual and material, are but terms to such a man. The surpassing fact is life itself. To what purpose, he would say, are all these distinctions and refinements? What greater miracles or revelation are you seeking than the curl of yonder smoke, or a hair on the back of your hand? Moses with his burning bush, or Jesus multiplying loaves and fishes, could not furnish more convincing proofs than these.

So accustomed are many to seek for the divine only in the unexplained, the unusual or the exceptional, that they overlook these simple every-day occurrences. Yet, to a mind like Whitman's, what a universe lay therein!

If Whitman is a poet and artist, he is, before everything, a religionist, and an ethical religionist at that. He tells us that he would inaugurate a religion. His claim is well founded. His quarrel is with unreality—with the shams, the shadows, the pretences and make-believes that pass muster for solemn truth. The simplest fact brings a man of this stamp to his senses: the clasp of the hand of

a comrade, the sense of wonder in the eyes of an infant in its cradle, the runaway slave seeking shelter at his door. "The bay mare shames silliness out of him." The very oxen express more to him than all the print he has ever read. "I do not snivel that snivel the world over that the months are vacuums and the ground but wallow and filth."

As one reads such sentences, one cannot fail to stand convicted of one's conscience. Into all that has escaped one—into the simple, trivial, every-day persons and occurrences that one has been familiar with ever since one could remember,—this man reads a celestial message. How it accuses us that we have not made—are not making—the most of our time! I suppose that the question, "Is life worth living?" never seriously troubled Whitman. Mortality for him was neither a sewer nor a tunnel. For him, if the sun did not shine, the clouds were present in the sky; and if he could not see the clouds, he just found something nearer at hand. Where most of us have brought logic to combat our fits of hopelessness and depression, Whitman finds himself better employed by taking the bad with the good, the grave with the gay: every emotion is to be an experience of value, and he finds little to be got by questioning or debating.

It is the same with his religion as with his life.

His morals need no bolstering up by authority or utilitarianism. They are the spontaneous outcome of his very soul. Loosed of imaginary limits, he launches himself into the unknown, greeting alike the unseen and the seen with a cheer. Nothing, he is convinced, can come to him that is not self-decreed, that the law of his own being has not, in some fashion, appointed.

Emerson has told us that "of immortality, the soul when well employed is incurious. It is so well that it is sure it will be well. It asks no question of the supreme power."

This is the case with Whitman. In his "Varieties of Religious Experience," Prof. James gives Walt Whitman as an example of the religion of healthy mindedness. It can truthfully be said, no more adequate illustration could be forthcoming.

Immortality is a foregone conclusion with him. All is immortality. Collapse, stoppage, extinction are unthinkable to one of his mind. He laughs at dissolution: to die is luckier than one supposed. "Has any one supposed it lucky to be born? I hasten to inform him or her it is just as lucky to die, and I know it."

All is destined to survive somehow, somewhere. "No doubt I have died myself ten thousand times before." "I know I have the best of time and



space, and was never measured and never will be measured." He even makes the startling announcement that he may, for aught he knows, reappear upon the earth after the lapse of 5000 years. For the will to suffer defeat, for his wishes and aims and purposes to be frustrated and brought to naught, is wholly inconceivable to Whitman.

Now and then he seems to attain a state of mystical ecstasy, and we feel constrained to remember his cautionary that he is untranslatable. But he does not leave us in cloudland. On the contrary, as if to check himself, as though he would restrain the enthusiasm of those who would do him violence and interpret him according to the canons of transcendentalism, he concludes the "Song of Myself" in a peculiarly quaint but inimitable manner. His words are these:

"I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,  
If you want me again look for me under your boot soles,  
You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,  
But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,  
And filter and fibre to your blood.

"Failing to find me at first keep encouraged,  
Missing me one place search another,  
I stop somewhere waiting for you."

## II

### SPIRITUAL CRANKINESS AND MORAL FADDISTS

ALMOST everybody, I suppose, is acquainted with a "crank" of some description—and some of us may possibly have earned the enviable reputation for being "faddists" or cranks ourselves. I think, therefore, that I am fully justified in assuming that all my readers will be familiar with the meaning of the words which stand for a title to this chapter. Such being the case, I need not enter upon a lengthy definition of these expressive terms.

Crankiness of the kind to which I happen to be referring may be encountered in all sections of society; indeed, it is a rather fashionable affliction. It takes different people, however, in exceedingly diverse ways. Many people of breeding, taste and culture, are cranks upon some special point, and some people who are totally lacking in polish and refinement are cranks no less. In most respects,

cranks are quite ordinary, every-day people—you would not suspect that they were different from the generality of persons; but on one point they adopt some view or opinion which distinguishes them from their critics. Consequently they are known as faddists.

In not a few respects, modern civilization is peculiarly favourable to the cult of the crank. We live in an age of specialization—when people are naturally anxious to appear different from everybody else. Hence, our mental life tends to become concentrated, or exclusively centred in particular channels or grooves. Grooviness is one of the curses of the age; an all-round man is the exception. If a man enters the medical profession now-a-days, he cannot achieve distinction unless he is a specialist. He must be an oculist, or an aurist, or an authority upon some valve of the heart or chamber of the lungs, or failing either of these, perchance a toe- or thumb-nail specialist. The “general practitioner” has long been relegated to the past. Nor is he alone in this respect. The same fate has overtaken many another. Everywhere one discovers our competitive system to have given rise to the cultivation of some one branch of knowledge to the exclusion of everything beside. Formerly this was not so. In days gone by, your apothecary was not unlike your clockmaker or

tailor or shoemaker, at least in this respect: he knew his craft from start to finish. To-day, however, all is changed. In his place we have, not only the physician, whose practical knowledge of dispensing is confined to what he learned when he was a student, but the "chemist's assistant," whose qualifications for his post are about sufficient to entitle him to undertake the arduous duties of librarian at a fancy goods' store.

Our present system may not be without its compensating advantages. Seriously, however, one is inclined to feel that, upon the whole, this age is tending to encourage a certain lopsidedness; with the ever-increasing multiplicity of our aims and interests, men are becoming too closely absorbed with some one special "line" to the exclusion of everything else.

As a natural consequence, people tend to live in the narrowest of worlds which society has contrived to fashion for them.

People often tell us that our civilization tends to broaden the mind. Rural life is voted slow, monotonous, and inconsistent with "progress." The point is doubtless open to dispute. My candid impression, however, is, that in our congested metropolitan areas people are very liable to live narrow, contracted lives, this being for the exceedingly obvious reason that

comparatively little scope is afforded to the play of the emotions. Just picture the insufferably wooden, stereotyped existence of the average breadwinner of to-day—of the man or the woman who, year in and year out, is forced to toil simply for the bare necessities of life—for the sake of a bare livelihood. Think of the industrial population, and then of the business men, the city clerks, and the impecunious professional classes who rise every morning—in some cases Sundays, and also Bank-holidays—simply with one idea facing them: that of going out to make money—in the factory, the office, or elsewhere, as the case may be; and who, when they have finished the day's routine, are too dead-tired to interest themselves in anything beyond the necessity for a few hours' physical rest. What cannot but be the result? Lopsidedness, and oftentimes premature decay.

Such people are often cranks, their interests being exceedingly limited, and their ignorance colossal. Even busmen, who must be included in this group, are cranks. The "busman's holiday" is indeed proverbial; in ninety-nine cases out of every hundred he has no interest whatever in anything beyond his own horses and public conveyance. Even the motor-bus passes his comprehension. A little while back I happened to be riding in London on the front seat on the top of an omnibus. As usual, I got into

conversation with the driver, who told me that he had been on his present bus, from the Bank to Notting Hill, for no less than seven years. In all that time he had never changed his route. I spoke to him of the improvements which had been made in the Strand. He expressed his surprise. Though he had lived in London the whole seven years, he had never been so far as the Strand. He was a crank. Circumstances had made him so.

And, from what I know of the habits of most men, so far from regarding my busman's case as exceptional, I should regard it as typical; unless we are altogether out of the common, we inevitably tend to live in quite as narrow and restricted a sphere. And besides the cranks which are created by the force of circumstances, we find the *self-created* cranks—a far more common variety. There are the cranks who play—or who try to play—as well as the cranks who work. We find football cranks, cricket cranks, golf cranks, bridge cranks, theatre-going cranks, betting cranks—people, in short, of all sorts who take up some special form of recreation and with whom their hobby becomes a mania. These cranks vary to some extent, individually. Thus we have the sporting crank who actually plays golf and cricket himself. Many of them, however, are contented to watch others play these games for them. Judging

by the attendances at cricket matches, football ties, and other athletic entertainments in recent years, these cranks seem to be increasing in numbers.

Now all these cranks may be at bottom amiable, inoffensive folk. To be a crank need not necessarily mean that one is a criminal. But the great drawback about all crankiness is, that it tends to make life one-sided and partial. It precludes the possibility of viewing it in its true perspective; and not a few of the so-called "indispensable adjuncts" of our civilized existence, limit and confine, rather than they can be said to extend, our mental horizon. Newspapers, for example, which are supposed to widen the intellectual life, under existing conditions positively succeed in narrowing their readers' range of vision. How many people, when they open a paper, do not turn to it as a modern oracle, in order to have their whims and prejudices reinforced and confirmed?

Besides intellectual cranks, however, there are others. People may become "cranky" from sheer pressure of circumstances, or through mere inclination. They may also develop this affliction from another predisposing cause: *viz.*, an overwhelming sense of duty. Upon the whole, this perhaps is the worst excuse that can be offered for crankiness. In any case, it is the most difficult type of crankiness to eradicate.

One often feels tempted to complain at a life that

is lived without a purpose: at the vicious system which compels people to cramp and cripple their intellectual faculties, and at those wasted lives which are frittered away in the pursuit of mere idle self-gratification.

But it may seriously be doubted whether either of these courses is as truly inimical to one's interests as a life upon which self-torture is inflicted upon moral grounds.

How prone mankind is, even now, to give credit to the person who is supposed to be doing his duty by performing some act of supererogation—by making a martyr of himself, or herself!

What a common experience it is to hear people associate the moral life exclusively with the idea of self-abnegation, and of complete indifference to one's just due. With many, the matter comes to this: if only a person contrives to torture himself sufficiently—if only he can be sufficiently inoffensive, meek, modest and mild, and self-sacrificing, he is immediately set down as a saint or a martyr.

Yet what a desecration of the moral ideal! Is there, one would like to ask, nothing better to be done than to make a martyr of oneself?

And, observe: I am not in the least disposed to call in question the sincerity or the devotion of the person who performs these acts of self-obliteration.



He may be, as I think he is, deluded and mistaken in his method. That he may, at the same time, exhibit an heroic spirit I should be unwilling to deny. What I am attacking is the absurdity and the immorality in the attitude of those who are ready to approve such actions.

How much sincerity and sympathy are wasted simply because people affect to believe it to be the long-suffering wife's duty to sacrifice every consideration—even her self-respect and chastity, to say nothing of her money—for the sake of some principle which has ordained that she shall live, until the hour of death, with some worthless fellow whom, in some rash moment of her youth, she was persuaded that she loved! How little common justice is shown when people will suffer conventions to override their rational judgment.

Nor would I, for one moment, be understood to say that the marriage bond should be esteemed lightly. Sacred it is, indeed. If, however, it is to be in actuality what it has stood for as an ideal, it must be something other than a burden. Wise was Goethe when he wrote, "We have no duty except when we love what we command ourselves to do." We may, it is true, deceive ourselves that duty and inclination are distinct, if not opposed, conceptions. Once, however, we search our hearts, and I believe

we shall realize that whatever is seriously considered to be a duty springs rather from love than from fear. Hence it is that people cannot be held together by the iron fetters of force and popular opinion. To make people realize the sanctity of the marital tie we must not bind them from without; nothing from without will endure. What must be done by society is to remedy the conditions which make unsatisfactory marriages possible.

The ethical crank may be of several types. The usual moral fanatic is what I would call the "one virtue" man. Life for him must be lived upon one principle—and one principle alone. This is the person who judges everybody by a single standard. He exalts some special moral rule at the expense of the rest. His watchword may be "fidelity," or "love," or "justice," or "truthfulness," or "sobriety," or "honesty," or "thrift." But he would subordinate everybody to his one virtue. Everybody he meets must be "steadfast," or "consistent," or "loving," or "just," or "truthful," or "temperate," or "honest," or "thrifty"—or he has no use for them.

Now, it need hardly be said how high these virtues must rank in the estimation of all who revere the ethical life. To be guilty of the smallest breach of the ethical law, must be to offend in all things.

Yet, how much of beauty and worth escapes us when we carry about a moral microscope with which to inspect others!

It is not that we should blind ourselves to the shortcomings of others. But what we have to remember is this, that their virtues are oftentimes less apparent than their failings. And that, if we would have them as they should be, we must realize their possibilities more.

An Eastern proverb runs, "Blessed be he who has the good eye." The good eye is like the divining rod: it helps us to find where the wellsprings in human nature lie. It sees the things that the physical vision and critical faculty alone can never assist us in finding. And it does even more than that. It enables the possessor to be creative. The "good eye" is nothing less than the creative eye. It calls to itself the things that it is constituted to behold. It brings to light the hidden things, and makes plain the dark ways and purposes of life. We often speak of people finding what they seek. Their search is rewarded by the care and sympathy which they bestow upon it. This is so with those who have the creative eye. They are the people who seem to make other people good. They will not see only the flaws and imperfections of those about them, and they even succeed in making others

less observant of the seamy side of people. The good eye does not measure people by itself. It learns to adapt itself to the object of its vision. And, unless he would become an ethical crank, a man must have the good eye.

Then, again, there is the crank who extols the "moral order" as if it were something superior to man. Superior to the conduct of many men it may be, and certainly is. But the moral law is not something that can be said to exist apart from ourselves.

The meanest and most depraved man is worth more than the most exalted moral theory as such. No greater idolatry is perpetrated than when men make a fetish of ethicism.

The moral faddist of whom I am speaking, invariably acts according to some "rule" as he calls it. Life to him is not a spontaneous or natural affair. It must be run on tram-rails. Every detail must be manufactured into a moral problem. The most trivial pleasure must be weighed. Such a man has "right or wrong" on the brain.

Now, I am fully aware that the sense of duty commonly appears to be in need of greater cultivation. People, it would seem, are slow to realize their responsibilities. Yet, the more I think it over,

the less am I inclined to believe that people require to be made more conscientious. Hosts of people who do the worst possible deeds simply do them on "principle"—on the false assumption that it is their duty to do them. The only reason that they can offer for fault-finding,—indulging their mild aptitude for persecution is,—that it is their duty to do thus.

This intolerable temptation to force the moral nature at the expense of the social and intellectual is noticeable even in children. From their earliest years, children are taught a habit of introspection, which, in its way, is no doubt an excellent thing. Every child should be brought up so that it is able to realize the claims of others, in order to do which a rigid process of self-examination must needs be encouraged. But to what lengths do not parents and teachers go in training the young in this respect, and with what deplorable results !

As I walk along the street, I hear children being told "how naughty" they are. The child runs a little way ahead of its elder : it is naughty. It stops a little way behind : it is naughty again. It falls down and dirties its clothes : it is naughtier than ever. The parents are not sincere enough to tell the child why it is naughty. Oh, no ; they do not say you are naughty because you give me the trouble of running after you, or calling you, or

waiting for you, or of dusting your clothes, or because I shall be put to the unnecessary exertion of smacking you. Not at all. They are not sincere enough to adopt so straightforward a plan of action. They must needs invent some mythical "sin"—telling the child that it is exceedingly "naughty," when it is only indulging its natural high spirits. In time, of course, confidence between their elders and the young is forfeited. Meanwhile, however, they imbibe utterly false notions of morality, and are apt to entertain morbid and distorted opinions of conduct. Frequently, to please their preceptors, they attempt to conform to a standard that is utterly beyond them—when they are accused of being prigs and hypocrites.

As it is, the entire method of instructing the young in behaviour is radically mischievous. Just as, if you pay particular attention to the body, you come to find you have any number of ailments; so with the soul. By this habit of excessive self-consciousness, the child loses all its natural spontaneity. Personally, I do not think children need much moral instruction. What they want is less interference from their elders and more companionship with little people of their own age. Then they evolve their own standards of morality. If you ask me whether children's moral training should be neglected, I am

constrained to reply, assuredly not. Nothing can be of greater importance than to see that their young minds receive the requisite stimulus to right doing. To have the care and training of youth is probably the greatest responsibility that can devolve upon one. Yet it is a responsibility too little understood. One cannot moralise effectually for the child's benefit unless its point of view is first appreciated. As a rule, the child has the advantage of its elders. It knows its teacher better than the teacher knows it. Like grown people, children cannot be made moral by compulsory measures. But here, again, children have the advantage. They foresee failure in the attempt which is made in so many cases to improve them. Conformity, it is true, may be secured by the ordinary means, but morals never. And be it remarked that, along with all servile conformity, the moral impulse ceases. The moral crank is always self deceived.

Why, I wonder, do so many people still labour under the abominable delusion that life must be rendered painful before it can be sweet and good? Why is the fallacious and pernicious notion still harboured that the moral nature grows and develops to better purpose in the dark than in the sunshine? —that self-torture is the only road to wisdom—and that unless life is made laborious and hard and

difficult it will be thrown away and wasted? What a horrible and blasphemous travesty of the truth! How can people persuade themselves that, as it is, there is not enough suffering and sorrow in life without augmenting these things? Without denying that it may be either necessary or a blessing in disguise, who, in his heart of hearts, can possibly bring himself to consecrate suffering? Yet, unthinkingly, that is precisely what we do every day of our lives!

What, I cannot help thinking, has yet to be learned is, that suffering and sorrow, if they are to be of the slightest educational value to man, must be accepted as matters of growth. To arbitrarily and deliberately inflict them either upon oneself or another, must be to rob them of whatever value they may possess in the evolutionary process. For it to be of service, suffering must depend upon experience. As it is, our view of suffering and punishment is erroneous. A man, let us say, commits some foul deed, of which he is adjudged guilty, and for which he is accordingly sentenced by society to a term of imprisonment. But the problem presents itself: is any conceivable purpose served by subjecting anybody to such treatment? Apart altogether from the obsolete view that proceedings against the offender are instituted as a safety valve for the outraged feelings of society against him, is it not a fact that,



so far from becoming the occasion of his reformation, incarceration in gaol may actually defeat its ostensible ends, inasmuch as it will afford the criminal an opportunity for reflecting upon the injustice to which the existing system has condemned him, and for deriving a low order of enjoyment in projecting further anti-social acts as a means of out-witting his foes? In any case, I suppose, the serious student of such a question must realize that suffering as a means to morality is, to say the least of it, unproven. In view of which fact, bearing in mind that experience teaches that people cannot be goaded into the "narrow way," a careful re-consideration of our methods should in future engage the attention of every progressive reformer and legislator. To this end the idea must become more general than is at present the case, that people are to learn the value of true citizenship other than by Acts of Parliament, prisons and policemen.

Better than any one of these is the force of example: the sphere of personal influence, at which all who are vitally interested in the welfare of the race should aim. What compulsion and force are powerless to accomplish, example and character will often—perhaps seldom fail to—effect. Yet to what extent is example relied upon under existing circumstances? To me the lamentable lapses in public and

private morals constitute a damaging indictment of the present order in this respect. And when I speak of "example," I do not mean that it is incumbent upon one to set up as a moral hero, or seek to be placed on a pedestal for the gaze of admiring beholders. How often people have tried this! How often have they failed! What a lesson it should teach us!

What I mean by the force of example is that unconscious power which one wields of influencing others; that personal contact with them which enables one to enter into their lives and become their advisers, counsellors and friends. This is often *felt* by another quite as much by what one leaves unsaid and undone as by the mere words one utters or the things one attempts. The greatest good in the world is not accomplished by the finest talkers or by those who live the loftiest lives under the public eye. On the contrary, the highest achievements often have their root in the silentest lives. The would-be reformer is not necessarily the most successful exponent of his own gospel. People resent, and rightly so, the notion of being preached at. And the most powerful incentive to holiness lies less in the sermon than in the suggestion, which any man may be capable of giving.

Where many of the world's greatest teachers have been misled has been in assuming that people were

to be made good by the application of mechanical or extraneous aids. They are not. Ethical cranks may tell us so. Experience, however, lends no support whatever to the assertion. The teachers have wanted to set down rules; but life is greater than any rules. Rules we must have, but they must not be of other people's making.

It may be a good thing to consider the rightness and wrongness of things. Indeed, I know of no deed that does not involve this consideration. But one may carry one's zeal too far. It may be right for me to be a vegetarian, or a teetotaler, or a champion of "woman's rights," but I have no right to expect you to copy me. I can well sympathize with a person whose scruples of conscience lead him to ask whether he ought to take one glass of wine or two, or whether he should abstain from taking any. But let me say this: if he cannot judge this for himself, I shall be unable to help him. I may advise him to the best of my ability, but in any case I can speak only as a friend—as one man would speak to another.

And this brings me to the point which I wish especially to emphasize—and it shall be my last—that, after all, our greatest opportunities for well-doing lie not in the great things of life—not in the stupendous attempts we would make to revolutionize

the world—not in the glorious deeds of history—but in the small services we can render one to another—in the little things that await us each moment of our time. There is always something to be done—to be done *by you*. See that you do it.

I know of no more effectual death-blow to ethical crankiness than that. Until we have made an end of moralism as a fad, as a hobby, we can never take it to heart or make it the be-all and end-all of life. And until it is this, the truth and the way must remain uncertain to the end of time.

### III

## "SUGGESTION" AS A FACTOR IN CHARACTER-BUILDING

THE principles of hypnotic suggestion are so generally comprehended, that there is no occasion that I should offer any remarks by way of explanation.

Almost everybody now-a-days understands *something*, at least, of the theory of the so-called "*subliminal self*" or "*sub-conscious mind*," and conceives it to be possible to induce certain states of feeling, disposition and habit, by the agency of the "will," exercised either by oneself or another.

One can scarcely take up a newspaper unless one finds some announcement in the advertisement columns to the effect that "Professor" Somebody-or-other will be willing to impart, (for some ridiculously trifling consideration,) exhaustive instruction upon the subject of self-command, together with information as to the control of fate, fortune, circumstances generally, and heaven knows not what

besides. Whether this enterprising gentleman might be described as a quack or a charlatan, need not for the purpose at present in view concern us.

What may fairly be assumed is, that the public mind is imbued with the unassailable conviction that there is at any rate something to be said for his pretensions. Nor need we dispute the point that there is more than the proverbial "grain of salt" in such claims. That hypnotic methods are *bonâ fide* is too well established to call for argument or debate.

What, however, popular opinion is not so well informed upon, is the practical aspect of this question. Directly the words "hypnotism" and "suggestion" are mentioned, one finds that people are inclined to jump instantly to the unwarranted conclusion that one is necessarily referring to some species of occultism or mystery. The subject is so completely identified with the various branches of transcendentalism, and so readily associated with the idea of visions and trances, that it is difficult to make people realize that it can possibly have any immediate connection with the facts of their normal, or waking life, in relation to which its value and importance are inestimable. It is just here, as it seems to me, there is the urgent need for a more thorough and intelligent grasp of the subject. It

will therefore be my endeavour, as far as possible, to offer some suggestions more especially with this end in view.

And in proceeding to do this, I would first of all remark that the hypnotic process is of far commoner occurrence than is generally supposed. Consciously or unconsciously we hypnotise others, or are hypnotised in turn (partially, at least) almost every day of our lives.

How usual it is for the most obvious facts of life to escape one's notice! Such creatures of habits are we, that by far the most important problems of existence pass unheeded altogether. And here is one such: *the enormous part which is played by "suggestion" in our daily life.*

I wonder whether it has ever occurred to us how much of our life is passed unconsciously—involuntarily—apart from the exercise of our much-vaunted volition and intelligence?

We have been so much accustomed to regard ourselves exclusively as self-conscious, rational beings, that it is something of a shock to discover how limited, in reality, are the range and extent of human faculty. We are apt to forget that, after all, reason is not the fundamental ingredient in our composition, any more than our mental and moral nature is wholly dependent upon it, and that, on

the contrary, however important a *rôle* it may assume in our normal state, our emotions and feelings must still assert themselves. The enormous importance of the law of association of ideas, to which modern psychologists have devoted so much attention, goes to show how entirely we are dependent upon our involuntary life—our instincts and sensations.

If you watch yourself at all closely, you cannot fail to discover that “suggestion” is a far more influential factor in your daily life than is commonly assumed to be the case. Every object that one sees, suggests to one’s mind and feelings somewhat more than one consciously supposes. In the course of a walk in the street, or a ramble by the hillside, one encounters numberless instances of this.

I pass (we will say) the shop window of a confectioner. The tempting delicacies displayed therein have caught my eye. I linger a moment or two—from sheer habit, as I did when a boy, and my mouth begins to water. What is the explanation? The vision before me has involuntarily awakened all the sub-conscious impressions lying latent in my mind, which are associated in some way with the flavours of the delectable morsels which are placed in the window to attract the passer-by.

If I happen to be the fortunate possessor of



money, I very likely enter the shop without a moment's hesitation and there and then purchase some of the good things; whilst if I am a poor, but hungry man, one of two alternatives may present itself: either I may be tempted to yield to a momentary impulse to take some of the goodies without payment (if I think I shall be able to elude detection), or I may stand at the door and beg for some coppers, in the hope of being able to buy for myself. Whether begging or stealing is justifiable or no we need not delay to consider. The point is: *that the suggestion is sufficient to account for the subsequent action which takes place.*

The range and application of this principle of "suggestion" are practically unlimited. All of us rely upon it to some extent. The business man, who "bluffs" and contrives "to get the better" of the person with whom he happens to be dealing, "suggests" what he wishes to his victim, (who, little suspecting his intentions, is completely talked round in spite of himself). A good deal of nonsense is often talked about the power of "fascination" and "personal influence." These may, it is true, exist. There are people one meets who seem to positively exhale a vital, magnetic atmosphere—just as there are others who appear to deplete one. "Suggestion" will, however, go a good way towards accounting

for personal success. The man or woman who is looked up to and regarded as an exceptional being, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, is simply the person who is able to exert the force of "suggestion" upon others.

And the fact must not be overlooked that, although the word "suggestion" has only recently acquired a specific meaning for us, mankind has for countless generations been familiar with the principle of which we are speaking. In Egypt and in India it seems to have been extensively practised in connection with the religious exercises of the people. Even to this day, with ourselves, the ecclesiastical authorities cannot afford to dispense with its employment; every rite and ceremony of the Church having a suggestive as well as a religious significance.

And this brings me to a point which I am especially desirous of emphasizing, which is this: How exceedingly suggestible the mass of persons still are. Religiously speaking, it is true, they may be more independent and rational than formerly, but, in the main, how sheep-like the masses are content to remain! When we say that a person can "think for himself," all we really mean to say is that he is not so apt as others to receive promiscuous suggestions; he allows himself time to deliberate and consider before he consents to act. These

people, however, it is obvious, are in the very small minority.

In this age of ours—an age of publics rather than individuals—people are, in many respects, doubtless far less credulous, far less believing, far less suggestible, than formerly. Their implicit faith in supernatural providences, in kings and princes and other personages of supposed superiority, has unquestionably diminished. Even now, however, one finds few persons who are not dominated by some hypnotic spell or other.

When we speak of likely subjects for suggestive treatment, we commonly think of the people who are most easily sent to sleep by the operation of the hypnotist. We think of some special form of nervous organization which the text-books would have us believe is especially responsive to the passes and commands of the mesmerist. But, in reality, the number of suggestible people is far greater than we or the hypnotists themselves ordinarily suppose.

*Everybody who allows himself to be dominated by the special opinions which prevail around him for no particular reason, is partially hypnotised.*

People are inclined to imagine that the hypnotic condition is a mere physical abnormality, a matter which science is competent to treat and explain. In reality, however, the hypnotic trance is a far more

complex phenomenon than that. People can, in point of fact, be *mentally* and *morally* hypnotised, and that irrespective of the ordinarily-recognised means.

Nothing is commoner than to discover people thus hypnotised—hypnotised, that is to say, to some craze, fad, view or opinion. Countless cases of the kind will occur to one. Anybody who is the slave of custom or the victim of habit is hypnotised to some extent. The society-butterfly, the political crank, the “Christian scientist,” the disciple of Tolstoy or Bernard Shaw, and the victim of drink or morphia, are all in the same boat: all are hypnotised; and whilst all these ends cannot seriously be regarded as equally undesirable, the attitude which is encouraged in every case is distinctly prejudicial. And this for the reason that it answers to a more or less complete suspension of the rational mind.

With many people to such extreme lengths is this carried that the mention of a mere word is sufficient to produce a hypnotic effect. We all know of people who are affected thus. Not only must that “blessed word Mesopotamia” be held responsible for nine-tenths of the world’s enlightenment, but other words—such as State, Government, Socialism, Imperialism—have had, at one time or another, an almost

equally potent effect. And strange as it may seem, the explanation is simplicity itself. The sub-conscious storehouse of these people's minds is so overladen with certain notions imbibed from particular sources pertaining (more or less remotely) to these topics, that, whenever the word is mentioned, all their irrational feelings are stirred, and they give vent to a more or less violent emotional outburst. Instead of attending to the view which may be propounded to them, they allow their old sub-conscious impressions to gain the ascendancy, so that they sometimes become positively insane.

Slight variations of these phenomena may be witnessed in different persons. With the political maniac the very mention of "Keir Hardie" or "Chamberlain" is sufficient to arouse any amount of such uncontrollable vehemence. And countless other forms are assumed by the self-same impulse. With Robert Browning, the poet, it seems to have taken a very peculiar shape. You had only to mention the word "Spiritualism" in his presence and he would immediately turn livid with rage. A sort of "collective hypnotism" of the same kind is seen when, at music-halls or at any large public gatherings, applause or a hostile demonstration greets the references which may be made to national events or well-known personages.

All hypnotised persons live in a little paradise

or hell of their own creation. Now everybody, no doubt, is entitled to this. The mistake however arises when one fancies that one's own abode must necessarily be that of everyone else. Yet that is precisely the state of mind of the hypnotised person. He is the victim of one idea: upon that his attention is fixed to the exclusion of everything besides. Concentration of the attention, it may be said, is by no means an undesirable mental element in itself. At the same time it is not everything. Contrary to the prevailing impression, genius is not merely an infinite capacity for taking pains. There must be something more; and the essential difference between a "one-idea" (or *hypnotised*) person and a truly rational individual is, that the latter selects his ideas, while with the other his ideas control him.

All unthinking, heedless people are likely to be hypnotised with a varying measure of success. These people are dominated by their subjective ideas. It is a peculiarity of the subliminal consciousness that it can initiate neither thought nor action. Its action is purely involuntarily, and all that it can do is to respond to whatever suggestions may be made to it. Such suggestions may either be made by another person or lodged in the objective or conscious mind. But in any case the "sub-conscious self" will, unless it be controlled, dominate. And there is, as it seems

to me, a very grave danger with all of us in this respect.

Without due forethought and a just discrimination, how easily we are persuaded against our better judgment and will! How often one finds the most deplorable instances of this! How many people who are not "wicked" but "*weak*" are irretrievably ruined by worthless companions and associates! Knowing as we do the overwhelming importance of environment and early training, how can it be that we blind ourselves to the immense significance and scope of such a factor as personal suggestibility? As it is, however, how little this question is considered! How rarely it is realised that the sub-conscious impulses of the young and weak-minded must always follow the path of least resistance; and that they comprise all those tendencies, habits, instincts and failings which have been handed down through a long line of ancestry, from a remote past, which (unless restrained by the rational mind) must inevitably wreck the entire character and career.

The need for instilling into the young the value of self-reliance is of paramount importance. All who have devoted the least thought to the great questions of life must have felt how essential is solitude—that spirit of self-communion in which one is led to seek the intrinsic worth of those principles by which one

will elect to live. To surmount the temptation of yielding too readily to the wishes and opinions of others, no course save this can be adopted with safety.

There are people who tell us when they have had some proposal made to them that they will "think it over," or "sleep upon it." They are wise. Instead of *accepting* "*suggestions*" off-hand, they have come to realize the value of acting upon those only which are actually of use to them, and which they have accepted on their own personal responsibility. And this is the important point—because I would not be understood to say that suggestion is essentially harmful (which indeed it is not).

People often ask us whether one person should hypnotise another. If by this they mean should one person experiment on another by seeking to subjugate that person's will, then I would reply assuredly not. Nobody should attempt to control another in any shape or form. At the same time, what we have to remember is, that we are both suggesting and being suggested to almost every moment of our lives. Every word we utter, or that is spoken by another in our hearing—every gesture we make, or see another make—the most fugitive glance—a stray motion of the eye—the movement of a finger—have a suggestive value; and the moral point is this: that the one thing at which we must aim is *right suggestion*.



Instead of allowing ourselves to be at the mercy of our unrestrained impulse and emotion, we must hold the rein tight and take command.

The secret of the matter then lies in being able to decide which suggestions are to be received and which should be rejected. The sub-conscious impulses may be compared to so many handles by which our will is enabled to grip our mental and moral nature. Here our judgment must enter, and thus by a process of discrimination the foundation of character will be laid. This, however, cannot be so long as old habits remain uncorrected. Until new aims and objects and interests are furnished, no improvement will be wrought.

And here, before concluding, let me say a word or two about the rescue of our habits from the sub-conscious department of our life. Whilst it is well to entrust as many habits as possible to the automatism of the body, the greatest care must be exercised in the formation of habit at the outset. If we watch ourselves we shall discover thousands of small habits which stand in need of instant rectification—little mannerisms, tricks of speech, and so forth. These, though far from wrong in themselves, may easily become a most prolific source of trouble to us; and hence, both for our own sakes and that of others, should receive immediate attention.

To rescue a habit, a more critical attitude of mind should be adopted. If anybody asked me for advice upon this point, I should be inclined to say this: In the first and last place, consult your better judgment and rely upon your conscience in the whole matter, and make your decision accordingly. Personally, I am convinced that there is no better plan than to make a practice of being undisturbed and alone for a few minutes each day. Let anybody spare (say) ten minutes in the morning when he will be free from interruption—and then quietly take stock of himself.

Let him, as far as possible, rid himself of the anxieties and cares of life: forget that yesterday existed, or that to-day must be lived through—and for a moment or two realize that he is living in eternity. And when I say this, I do not mean that a dreamy visionary mood should be invited. What I do mean is, that one should be able to retire at the word of command from the accustomed scene of struggle and stress which is involved in existence. For this purpose I know of nothing better than to secure a moment or two of silent meditation at fixed intervals. Let a person who thus aspires, make it a principle to take some short passage from a favourite author—some quotation (say) from Ruskin, Carlyle, Emerson, the poets, or the Bible.

And having done so, let him not only recite the words, but absorb the sense. By this means, he may discover a new point of view in his universe—he may even himself become a creative force in the world.

And this is the value of suggestion: to enable us to see the “hidden things”—to unveil the secrets which are realized only by the discerning. The prophets and seers of all ages have thus known—and in those hours when we re-think their thoughts, and experience afresh their emotions, we enter anew into the heart of things.

## IV

### THE KEY TO PERFECTION

ALL moral and religious reform may be said to have, for its ultimate aim and object, *Human Perfectionment*. Man as he is, and man as he may become—our limitations and achievements on the one hand, and our aspirations and possibilities on the other—must assuredly be regarded as the fundamental consideration in all problems which have acquired a spiritual significance for us.

Goethe has declared that “the wish to be perfect is the measure of man.” And undoubtedly he is right; because, however grievously he may appear to outrage the law of his being, and however wilfully he may transgress and defy those supreme ordinances which originate in his own higher nature, man is a creature whose constitution is incessantly compelling him to seek out that which will enable him to rise in the scale. It is upon this discovery

of his that we have bestowed the sacred name, Ethical Ideal.

It is, perhaps, oftentimes difficult for us to realize the moral purpose in life. So gradual, so imperceptible, is the process by means of which the redemption of man is accomplished, that we may almost be led to doubt its existence altogether. How often one is tempted to question the moral tendency of events, and to ask whether, after all, life in the aggregate *is* richer, fuller and completer than it was : whether things have, in reality, improved : and whether, in the main, men are on the upward grade. How many of us, I say, put such searching questions to ourselves, and seek in vain for the solution.

Yet the answer is nigher than we think, and proofs in the affirmative are awaiting us already in the record which we may discern in the evolutionary history of the race. As we glance back upon the past, and compare the actual attainments of man with the immeasurable desire for the betterment of the lot of the species to-day, one is forced to accept, however reluctantly, the admission that there is, in man at least, "a power that makes for Righteousness"—a something seated in the angelic breast of the forerunners of our race that is bent upon effecting the deliverance of mankind. This

much, at least, is certain ; and, indeed, I think that we must further recognise that, as compared with the evolutionary process in general, this factor of which we are speaking works with surpassing celerity. When one contemplates the inconceivably protracted periods during which the world-process has accomplished itself, with the relatively short space of time during which man has won his way even to his present estate, I say that one has every reason to thank whatever gods may be, and to hold one's peace henceforward. However far distant the millennium may be, at least we have the best of grounds for assuming that something has been not only attempted, but achieved.

It is not, however, to my purpose to take a survey of human history from this standpoint. Here one is naturally on debatable ground, and one feels well nigh appalled by the prospect which opens up before one's vision. To what extent man has, in the past, progressed, or whether or no the race is at some future time destined to approach some inconceivably wonderful state of perfection, need not concern us. Such an enquiry, after all, is best undertaken by the historians and anthropologists, who have already furnished us with an imposing array of theories upon the subject. What I am rather anxious to consider is the sense of perfectibility in man—which may be

said to exist in the soul of each one of us, and which may be regarded as the well-spring of all our higher motives, conduct and character.

That all of us have indeed some such standard of goodness to which we would attain, it seems almost superfluous to state. Human nature is, in its very essence, governed by the contemplation of ideals, and especially of moral ideals. And, whilst this same moral bias may be educated, trained and developed, like any other faculty, it must yet remain the absolute fact of life for us for all time.

And in embarking upon this subject it may be pertinent to put one question at the outset of my reflections—viz., What are we to understand by the term "Perfection" itself? What practical significance can be said to attach to the word for us? and how may the conception which it embodies be regarded as having any utility for us?

As I commenced by remarking, our conception of man, in reality, involves and includes some conception of an ideal self. Somewhat there is within us which is seeking to transcend our empirical self; somewhat there is potentially resident within us which ever implies more than we can at any time be said to actually express. How much of the life of everyone of us lies beneath the surface, beyond the rude powers of computation at our disposal!

How many of our dearest wishes and most cherished ideals remain, in consequence, unrealized! I often think that the foremost problem of life consists in summoning at will these more intimate states of consciousness. If only we could do that, and had even the courage to attempt it, how different life would be! As it is, how seldom we dare to name, either to ourselves or another, these foretastes of a wider bliss!

As I say, then, there is that within us which is seeking, partly consciously, but largely unconsciously, some measure of perfection—that which is attempting to achieve a larger growth than is ours to-day. Yet what is it that we mean when we speak of striving after, or reaching, Perfection? and what import can the word be said to have for us?

First of all, now, let me speak of the abuse of this word. With only too many, it is to be feared, Perfection suggests the idea of some remote, if not unattainable, state of being. Only too often we find it identified with some super-terrestrial condition, involving some species of hyper-human excellence. And it may be well to point out how demonstrably false and misleading such a conception is. I am often tempted to speculate whether mankind could be influenced more adversely by wrong ideals or by having no ideals. If I were seriously asked, I should



be inclined to say that false ideals were more pernicious than no ideals. How infinitely better many people would be if, instead of allowing themselves to dream of the lofty heights which they fancy they were made to scale, they would content themselves by remaining what they are, and fulfil their appointed tasks !

How often this word Perfection is applied to some state of existence altogether apart from the aims and interests of life as we know it—to some hypothetical state of beatitude such as would involve the suspension of every function by which we are enabled to manifest our manhood and our womanhood ! What cannot but be the result ? Is not the result an almost entire emasculation of every moral and virile trait ? The popular view of Perfection is mischievous in the extreme. In the first place, it is too exclusively associated, from long usage, with the conventional notions of sainthood, martyrdom, angelic beings and demi-gods. It is arbitrary. It savours too much of a contempt for ordinary and natural distinctions between right and wrong. When once one reaches these superior eminences, there is always the danger that the facts of the common-life will escape one. And such, in practice, only too often proves to be the case. In reaching out to the infinite, how many a man neglects the claims of the finite. And what

reference, one would ask, can the life of some celestial being, robbed of all human feelings and emotions, bear to yours or to mine?—to what extent can the fabled immaculateness of imaginary deities be said to affect us?—or how should we try to order our lives according to such patterns? Is not this self-imposed task, in only too many instances, an utter impossibility? I am acquainted with many persons, both outside and inside orthodox circles, who affect to believe that Perfection must consist in the subordination of life to some such abstract ideal. Their one aim is to crush out sensation, to rid themselves of every natural feeling, to dispossess themselves, in point of fact, of every distinctively human characteristic. Oblivious of the fact that to mortify the passions is by no means the same thing as to conquer them, they have imbibed the fallacious notion that, to purify and ennoble life, their one aim must be to become non-natural. As if, forsooth, nature could be opposed to their highest interests! What is the result? These people, who are usually the most sensitive, sentimental and emotional of folk, are betrayed into acts of the utmost folly. In straining after the unattainable they miss the attainable. Self-deceived, they pass their lives in the most demoralizing of dreams.

Do you know that it sometimes seems to me that

what is wanted in life are not “ideals” at all? What people stand in need of are not theories and dreams, but the common-sense, the courage and conviction which would enable them to free themselves from the spell under which they have been cast by the dreams and visions and ideals of other people. Our thinking has, for ages, been corrupted in this way. As a consequence, our lives have fallen far short of what they should and might have been. We are still contaminated with puritanic notions. Instead of recognizing that the body must be reckoned with and made a co-operator in life by being trained and directed towards moral ends, we still prefer to regard the flesh as the foe of the soul. We have put ourselves into moral blinkers, so that by far the greater part of the beauty and truth of the great world of nature in which we dwell has been lost upon us.

Many people still glorify the ascetic life for its own sake—as if it were necessarily something “good” to make oneself uncomfortable. If only a man is mild and meek, or poor and resigned, he is certain to have sympathizers. Sympathy however of this sort is the curse of our civilization. It is a moral miasma—the deadliest drug—stultifying every ethical instinct that man can lay claim to. When shall we cease to profess to think that suffering and privation are providentially ordained, but know them as the resultant of

bad economic conditions? When shall we be honest and sincere enough to take the responsibility for crimes of omission, as well as crimes of commission, upon our own shoulders? We are already, it is true, beginning to do this; but our progress as yet is slow. Before it can be accelerated, popular opinion must have realized that to acquiesce in the inevitable is no proof of virtue. A state of society that admits of no room for the legitimate exercise of human emotion, so far from being wise and beneficent, it must be seen, is utterly opposed to any worthy ideal of human perfection. So far from its being "wrong" for people to covet means, opportunity, power and so forth, nothing could possibly be better—providing only that these things are directed to social ends.

Fanatics and fools may tell us that these things are delusions and snares; but who, I would ask, having enjoyed such privileges, would be willing to forego them? Does not such an one feel that the best course open to him, if he is a normally-constituted being, is to utilize these things in such a way as to secure both his own and others' well-being? Such a man is a true individualist: though in what respect his ideal is in conflict with the requirements of social democracy I am at a loss to discover.

Unworldliness (*i.e.*, public spirit) and other-worldliness (self-abstraction) are often confounded. Nothing is more usual than to hear people confuse these terms. Yet, as may easily be seen, they are diametrically opposed. For whereas *other-worldliness* is simply a state of natural blindness, and hence a condition of spiritual obscurity, *unworldliness* is that state of detachment which enables us to utilize all goods, functions and faculties which are at our command, for the common good. Whilst the one state is paralyzing and suicidal, the other is the means whereby a man learns the secret of perpetual renewal.

Yet other-worldliness, even now, is quite commonly regarded as the lawful attitude for man. Men still adorn themselves with moral blinkers, and endeavour to strain their transcendental notions into unison with their lives. But how their life loses in the process! When Jesus of Nazareth counselled the wealthy young man to dispossess himself of his riches and to distribute to the poor, he may have had in mind some such notion. With his almost fanatical zeal for the poor and the oppressed, "the beautiful gentle God" may have regarded riches in themselves as a curse and a pitfall. When he advocated self-renunciation he may indeed have believed that to abjure one's natural wishes and

desires was positively essential to salvation. But if so, whatever may be pleaded in extenuation of his theory at the time at which he taught, let me expressly point out that the consensus of opinion at this hour does not bear out the tenability of his gospel; nobody, not even the bishops, being anxious to forego the stipends to which their exertions may justly entitle them. And, let me add, that they are right. Whatever transcendentalists may allege, to live without the wherewithal is like embarking upon some commercial enterprise without capital.

There is, however, an alternative interpretation of the Prophet's words. And, for my own part, I cannot help believing that it is this which must have been in his mind. What I take to be the true import of his words, "Sell all that thou hast and give to the poor," is this: that implicit reliance upon externals, in any shape or form, is incompatible with progress and enlightenment. To be wise, to be just, to be in any sense *perfect*, one must as a preliminary have elected to live by the inward law—one must have divested oneself of current superstitions of sense—and have consented to rule one's life according to the dictates of reason and conscience.

Anything short of entire self-commitment cannot be accepted. All is determined by the attitude and volition of the believer. To me (perhaps because

he still stands in my eyes as one of the most stupendous events that our benighted world has yet beheld), it is utterly inconceivable that Jesus should have extolled poverty at the expense of every other condition. And, although this seems to have been the impression which he produced in men's minds, I still question very much whether his teaching as a whole justified any such assumption on their part. Great wealth may, it is true, have its drawbacks, and now no less than formerly. Its presence at least testifies to inequitable social arrangements. But where, on the other hand, is the *merit* in being either poor or rich?

Is the rich man to be cursed because he prefers to administer his wealth himself? Is the poor man to be blessed simply because he manages to escape the responsibilities which riches should entail? Let us confess it, under existing arrangements, the poor can seldom afford to be "good": goodness entailing a certain measure of means. Can we not see that the virtue of self-sacrifice is simply a figment of a disordered moral imagination? That, if we are normal, healthy beings, we do desire and must desire a sufficiency of this world's goods for ourselves, and something over and above to share with others? Why should we shut our eyes to this?

To be deprived of worldly advantages, either by God or man, believe me, is no greater blessing—either in disguise or otherwise—than to embark upon a career of indulgence and debauchery. Mean-spirited, idle, irresponsible people may try to persuade us that poverty is blessed. Our statistics, however, warrant a very different opinion. Far more wickedness, it turns out, is attributable to poverty than to wealth. Beautiful as may be the virtue of contentment, the fact must not be lost sight of that we are enjoined to be content with what we have, and that to be contented when we have nothing is impossible. Nothing can be more natural than for people to desire the means of gratifying their emotions, and the sooner it is realized the better. I would add, moreover, that it is not only natural, but *right*, and that it is right because it is natural.

In the second chapter it will be remembered that I spoke of the “one-virtue” folk—of the people who delight to ride the moral hobby, and who would have us believe that a man’s entire life should be cast in the mould of some one virtue. Thus we have people who extol thrift, or honesty, or sympathy, to the exclusion of every other virtue, and who push these virtues to their extremest limits. Such people depict the whole world as a gigantic



savings bank, or Sunday school, or as if it were a monster soup-kitchen. But what such people do not realize is the relativity of virtue, and the fact that, unless a sense of proportion be observed, every virtue may assume the nature of a vice. To regard the moral life in this mechanical manner must be to ruin its essential meaning. Life cannot be summed up in a single virtue. Perfection does not consist in the attempt to adapt ourselves to the moral opinions which spring from the minds of others. If Perfection is genuine, it is spontaneous.

A solitary virtue, reared and cultivated as an exotic, is generally a cloak for some vice. When people pride themselves on the possession of some one excellence, one as a rule does well to avoid them. How many people assure us that they are sticklers for truth, for example, or that their one aim is to be fair and just in their dealings. How is it that these very people so often fail in matters of common honesty, where people with fewer pretensions would perhaps succeed? If virtue be genuine, its mention is superfluous. The good man is good simply because he cannot be otherwise. Only the degenerate and morally defective prate of virtue.

And here a word or two as to the danger of the mere assumption of virtue may be not out of place. As a rule, people appear to be tolerably particular

to avoid the appearance of evil. This doubtless is as it should be. But directly a person is unduly anxious to avoid outraging the canons of propriety and convention, one has reason to be on one's guard. The over-particular, "mock-modest" person is usually the moral weakling. He must have *something*—so, what he lacks in character he has to make up in reputation.

I do not think that any sincere man need trouble about his reputation. Take care of your character and you can afford to let reputation look after itself. Human Perfection, such as it is, must depend, in the first, second, and third place, on one thing: that thing is character. Character, however, does not depend upon outward parade. It is an inward, and therefore a revealed fact. All perfection, however, is inward before it is outward.

Perfection, if it be natural, must be the outgrowth of oneself—the expression of the life of the soul. It must therefore be unique, the product of what Emerson speaks of as self-reliance. The humblest, as well as the greatest, soul may be perfect, after its own order. The perfection of the daisy or the forget-me-not is as complete as that of the orchid or the rose. Perhaps the beauties of the latter are more apparent; but if so, it is because our standard of beauty is inadequate and artificial, perfection being

exemplified wherever the fulfilment of function is illustrated.

And this suggests to me the thought (which shall be my last), how easily the assumption of virtue defeats its own end. However good a man may profess to be, depend upon it the real test of his worth comes out in his relations with others. To be "good" is not enough. It is a mere fiction. To be good in a human sense must mean that one is good for *something*—for some end, for which they are content to live. Thousands of people are ready to be "good"—for nothing in particular. They like the "idea" of "goodness"; it fascinates them. They like to fancy that there is some "invisible" portion of themselves remaining undiscovered by the "coarse people" about them. It consoles them to think that "some day" they will be understood, and their fine intentions will be appreciated at their true worth. But such "Perfection" is nothing less than a myth. Be content to be good, and you will seem far better than you deserve to appear. Declare your latent conviction, and however much you may be misinterpreted, some one at least will discover you.

How amazingly quickly children see through the artificiality of pretended virtue. Have you ever thought why it is that if you take ever such pains to teach children the things they should know and

do—their prayers, their Bible, and the rest of it—unless you live as you would have them be, you will never succeed in making them good children? Have you ever considered why it is that children, as a rule, copy the bad deeds of their elders sooner than their good deeds? We are sometimes told that this is the result of natural depravity. I do not believe it. There is a more satisfactory explanation. Children copy our bad deeds quicker than our good deeds simply because we are in earnest about them. We do our bad deeds to please ourselves, but half the time we assume virtues simply to impress other people. The child sees through our veneer. It knows we backbite, and cheat, and tell lies in earnest—whilst we are half-hearted with our virtues—and so it copies our failing before it condescends (as alas! it does later) to imitate our virtues. The moral bias of the child is of extraordinary strength. It may be wrong for children to backbite and cheat and tell untruths. I do not say that it is not; but it is a thousand times worse for their elders to expect children to practise something that they are not prepared to do themselves.

The sooner we get rid of all abstract Perfection the better. I do not wish to anticipate what I purpose to deal with in the next chapter: but this much I will say—that Ideals which have no place

in our lives, which do not take the form of concrete acts, and are incapable of being translated into deeds, are a hindrance rather than a help.

We have much to learn, but we have much more to unlearn. And one of the principal things that we have yet to realize is that Perfection is not ready-made for man. There is no Perfection awaiting us, either in heaven or upon earth.

No God can manufacture Perfection for you and me, any more than He can create righteousness. Perfection is not static, but dynamic. If we must have it, it must depend upon ourselves—upon growth—upon development. No disciple—no mere follower of another—no mimic can be perfect. To be the mere echo of another—even of the greatest man who ever lived—to be the incarnation of Jesus or Buddha himself, would not mean that one had reached Perfection. No: to be perfect, one must have become oneself; have taken himself for better or worse, have learned the value of self-reliance, and in that have realized the supremacy of principle. It is in this that Perfection inheres, and well is it for that man who, thus knowing, abideth therein.

## V

### IDEALS, IDEALISM, AND IDOLATRY

MAN is by instinct creative. His kingdom does not lie in the actual alone. There, it is true, his aspirations and yearnings, his apprehensions and misgivings, are at length destined to fulfil themselves. His nature and constitution, however, adapts him to become the inhabitant of another—perchance a loftier clime—to wit, the possible.

By virtue of an inherited impulse within us, we are all idealists at heart. Involuntarily, (I had almost said, in spite of ourselves,) we are compelled to view life from some ideal, some imaginary standpoint—and are forced, as it were, to construct a universe in some measure in keeping with our own peculiar individual idiosyncrasy.

It is pre-eminently characteristic of human childhood thus to disport itself in a region peopled by the phantoms of its own creation. Age may bring wisdom or disillusionment, but nescience and

infancy revel in such supersensible imagery. From the very earliest times, before the race emerged from its primeval savagery, we find man bent upon picturing to himself a state of things far removed from the existence which his senses reported to him. And it is no less true with the individual. Only as we attain to years of discretion, —when the romance and poetry of life are supposed to be outworn or crushed out of us—are we willing to confess that life as *it is* and life as it *may be*, offers the directest of antitheses.

And of all the errors and follies into which a man may be betrayed, even as he grows older, there is none more subtle, none more insidious or deadly, than the cherishing of some false, some outgrown ideal. And when I say a *false ideal*, let me attempt to make my meaning clear at the outset.

Man is, by nature, a worshipper. His heroes and demi-gods have, from the beginning of time, been part and parcel of his very existence. Without some higher being, some *alter-ego*, or some apotheosized self—some object, no matter what, which he was at liberty to reverence, love, obey and serve, in some shape or form—it were impossible for man to have existed.

And when we consider this matter, how much

this instinct still weighs with us. Where is a single act, one thought, or even so much as a word which one feels to be worthy of oneself, that has not been prompted by some ideal consideration—some lofty purpose, or for the sake of some supremely sacred person or principle which one may have postulated?

We may, some of us, have got beyond the stage when we could honestly say that we did all for Jesus' sake. We may possibly no longer pretend that we are Christians in any orthodox sense, (any more than we are Buddhists or Mahomedans, or followers of Confucius). Yet this rupture with the old metaphysic does not involve the rejection of all, or indeed any, of the ideal standards (for the ideal is, after all, not independent of ourselves). On the contrary, whether our ideal at this moment be personal or impersonal, whether it be incarnate in some human or celestial being, or whether it be represented in some principle to which we may have yielded unfeigned allegiance, an ideal for us it still remains. And without ideals, without the recognition of some power beyond our actual selves, without the realization of some infinity either about, above or within us, human activities were impossible.

Whilst this is so, however, it is no less a fact that ideals will, and must in the very nature of



things, vary from age to age. There is a "fashion" in ideals, as well as in manners, customs or religions. Ideals partake of the nature of the soil whereupon they are raised, and are inevitably conditioned, according to circumstances and events. Not only may we remark that religious and social ideals have varied enormously at different epochs, but also, as we review our life retrospectively, we may observe that our own ideals have undergone untold modification and change.

As children, our ideals were inspired, I suppose, very largely by our parents, and by the relation in which they stood to us. Accordingly, we modelled our lives very much upon the ideas with which they imbued us. In seeking to please them, we naturally accepted the point of view which they selected as suited to us. Later, however, as we came to think for ourselves, as we began to consider more the necessity for taking our own part in the drama of life, our ideals underwent a corresponding change. This change may have been, as it probably was, well nigh imperceptible. It nevertheless occurred. Instead of remaining content to derive our standard from a concrete example without, we came to adopt some sort of abstract ideal within ourselves. Whether we admitted it or not, our individuality gradually asserted itself, and as we acquired greater self-

reliance and came to realize the importance of exercising our reason and judgment, so we came to find in these faculties the very loadstar of our life. Perhaps we were driven to this extremity through sheer necessity. Perhaps we discovered that the advice which our elders gave us was, in the long run, prejudicial to our truest interests. Perhaps we had been deceived and disillusioned. Perhaps, too, we found (as I believe we all do, sooner or later) that one man cannot live for another—that a model which will serve for one person is not necessarily that upon which another should seek to pattern his life. But in any case—if we were wise, if we were people of even average thought—we decided that it was best for us to cut ourselves adrift from our old moorings, and start life on our own account, without the old theories which we had learned, or mislearned, in our youth.

And yet, whilst this may have been so, and great as may have been the change that was wrought in us as we grew up, how many of us, I wonder, could honestly say that he was now *living up to his own ideal*—that he was true to that ideal which he felt to be in keeping with his specific moral and spiritual requirements? or how many could seriously pretend that that ideal upon which they have professed to set their heart was truly worthy of their devotion?

The more one considers this matter, and the more one reviews one's life, the more perplexing does the problem which we are considering become.

Personal ideals, when once they are formed, I would point out, are the most difficult of all things to eradicate. It is comparatively easy to convince a man of the folly of his *deeds*, or to succeed in showing him that he has been guilty of some special piece of concrete wickedness. You may very speedily persuade a person to believe that he has committed some actual offence or other. You may go so far as to invent some imaginary sin, and even impose on his credulity to the extent of making him confess that he has been the perpetrator of it. Society constantly does this. Officials are retained and paid to keep up this semblance of morality. Judges and magistrates and policemen exist for the express purpose of terrorising over unfortunate people in this manner. And many of these people, rogues, vagabonds, ne'er-do-wells, and other social pests, actually come in many cases to believe that they are leading worse lives than persons who pass for respectable folk, but who, I would add, are often no less idle and worthless. Nothing can be easier than to induce a person to repent of his deeds; to get him into a frame of mind in which he will be led to regret his behaviour. For him to abide by what

he has done, a man must be a very extraordinary moral hero.

But to persuade a man to confess that he is in theoretical error, that his ideals are false, and that he is acting from unworthy motives, is by no means so easy. Neither your indigent loafer nor your wealthy loafer shows the slightest wish to do that. Nor will any man confess, if he can possibly help it, that he has been cherishing all along some vain, idle, mischievous delusion, to which his conduct was really attributable. He is too great a coward. And so he "bluffs" us. He puts us off by telling us that his inner life is his own "private" concern—that it is "sacred"—like "the home"—like his "family life." What hypocrisy! It is hidden because it will not bear inspection! Outward conformity is his god. That is all he requires. And so, in time, he comes to be an atheist—the only sort of atheist that we know of—a man who denies the authority of conscience—who sets at defiance his inner monitor.

There are many persons, I believe, who imagine that ethical religion actually countenances all this sort of thing. There are many persons, I affect to think, who imagine that all attempts to inculcate moral instruction are doomed to failure; and that all we can reasonably expect to attain is a certain degree of conformity. Only too often morals are

proverbially, a commonplace affair. As if morals were a question merely of trick, habit or imitation. How insupportably fatuous! Ethicism, truly interpreted, is by no means a mere system of legal compulsion. The very last thing in the world that it would advocate would be to force anybody to adopt any special code or course of life against his better feeling and judgment. So far from that, ethical religion is a standing protest against the absurdity and immorality of expecting any man to conform to any ordinances or opinions whatsoever, be they human or divine, simply on the score that they have received universal acclamation. All morals, if they be genuine, must be an individual matter. There is no such thing as moral or immoral custom. *In other words, ethicisim is a plea for idealism.*

But when this fact is affirmed, let us see what the admission really involves. The last thing that either ethical religion or its representatives would seek to encourage is the misleading view that ideals of any kind are worthy and beautiful in themselves. As such, ideals have no value whatever. Unless they are vitalized by human purpose and endeavour, they might just as well be non-existent. For "idealism," in the usually accepted sense, the ethiculturist has little use. If, however, the ethical religionist is not an idealist in the philosophic sense, neither is he of

necessity a utilitarian. Without committing himself to any one theory as to the genesis and evolution of the moral nature, what he would affirm is this: whether or no an "ideal world" can truly exist alongside of the present world—whether or no there be a "higher life" awaiting us—whether or no there be "divine justice" executed in the universe—this much at least is certain: unless we grasp as the essential principle of life the fundamental fact that the conditions of life are remediable, and not only so, but that it is within our own province and power to do something to actually better them—nay, that it is our *bounden duty* to do this—and that all speculation as such is irrelevant—we must fail to realize the claims either of morality or religion.

The breach between "religion" and "morality" is deplorable. To conceive of religion as applying only to transcendental and miraculous processes is as pernicious as it is fallacious. Morality, if it be genuine, *is* religion. Just think of the number of people who misconceive religion as it is only too generally understood. Sundry visionary ideas are entertained and encouraged simply because it fascinates these people to harbour them. I would not suggest that to live in the contemplation of such notions could not yield any result. But would to God that such

results were different from what they only too often prove !

Numbers of people whom one knows embrace what they are pleased to term Christianity. Twentieth-century Christianity is a truly remarkable product. We are told, too, that it is no less beautiful: that the sublime central figure, so full of pathos and tenderness, is a glorious and blessed inspiration. Undoubtedly, it may be replied, it may have been so; thousands may even now believe it to be such. But the real point is: how far does it inspire those who profess to live by it? So many people hold ideals as if they were trump-cards, or because they imagine that, even if they are of no special use to anybody in particular, they are "on the whole good for the world at large." I need hardly point out, however, that there is no merit in entertaining "beautiful thoughts" for the sake of others, but that the only merit consists in doing beautiful deeds for their own sake.

I have often put the question to people: "Why do you profess such profound admiration for Jesus?" And the answer I have received has invariably been of the vaguest character. These people have replied that the conception itself was "so glorious, so stupendous, so unique," that it could not fail to appeal to any man; and that it would appeal to me in the

same way if only I were spiritually awakened. But, I will put it to you, what do these terms, "glorious," "stupendous," "unique," mean? What precise idea do they convey to our mind unless we accept them as applying to ourselves?

The real point is this: how far does the ideal weigh with us, and to what extent are we willing to refashion our lives upon it? Are these people who tell us so much about Christ as a fact and a pattern for men, prepared to carry out the things which he presumably regarded as essential to men's eternal peace? Do they distribute their goods to the needy, or do they not grumble at the rates? Are they content to be persecuted, regarded as insane, outcast, betrayed or crucified for their sentiments, or do they not take care to live with as little inconvenience to themselves as possible? Here is the test; so far as I can see, the only test.

But if you tax your twentieth-century Christian with these matters, he replies that the times are changed, that Christ's work has so far been accomplished that it is no longer necessary to fulfil his Master's injunctions "too literally." That the times have changed I am quite willing to admit; but that the triumph of Christianity has been complete as the confident tone of its average advocate would lead me to suppose, I am by no means so certain. But this



may be allowed to pass. What, however, cannot but strike the impartial observer is the singular incongruity between the theory of Christianity and the practical life of self-respecting and respected Christians. In view of which fact I ask, "Then why, in the name of common honesty, select an ideal up to which it is impossible to live? Can you, my friend, honestly afford to profess one thing and at the same time allow your life to be a flat contradiction of it?"

Please understand that I am not arguing in favour of primitive Christianity. I do not believe in the necessity for self-immolation, or vagrancy, or poverty. Far from it. I do not honestly believe that the world would be a better, sweeter, cleaner place if you and I were to perambulate the thoroughfares of our crowded metropolis announcing that the kingdom of God is at hand. On the contrary, the offence that we should offer to the powers that be—and especially to the custodians of official Christianity—would alone forbid such a procedure. Neither do I believe that it would be advantageous to the population if we volunteered to part free of cost with our possessions. The education which we receive in the hard school of experience, and which I believe would forbid such philanthropic enterprise, I take to be a far more effectual teacher than any sentimentalism associated

with Christianity. What I do say, and say without an instant's hesitation, is, that men are singularly, lamentably inconsistent. Such "faith" as they hold is only too often a sham, a pretence, a make-believe. At least, they do not believe in the God they are supposed to worship at all. All that weighs with them is the fear of man—the fear lest they should be suspected of "religious infidelity," whatever that may mean to them. They quake lest, unless they bow before the popular idol, they will be anathematized.

The "popular idol." That is exactly what Christ has become—a popular idol—a myth—an "ideal"—something to be "reverenced," "loved," "sought," "believed in"—anything but *lived*. How terrible! Christ, a myth; Christianity, a "beautiful thought." How awful! Yet such is the situation. If this is not the case, why is it, I ask, that people would rather be thought "unchristian" than "pagan"? It is esteemed a comparatively insignificant offence to be guilty of some breach of Christ's injunctions—to defame, envy, swindle or pervert the truth; but to openly announce one's disbelief in an impossible ideal is still to court social ostracism; and this despite the fact that one may still live up to the highest ethical code, which (after all) is all that man, or God for that matter, can require. Oh, the un-

speakable hypocrisy of it all! When shall we have the courage to openly profess an ideal up to which we can live? Why cannot people at least have the common honesty to renounce their ideal if they cannot mend their ways?

So my point is this: *unless an ideal can be lived, it is useless—it is dead.* And what is worse, *the life of such a man* is dead also. Every moment that we devote to revering such an ideal—every moment that we spend in hymning its praises—is so much waste of time and breath—a living lie. Better by far have no ideal at all than a useless ideal. It may be said, as it probably will, that to saturate oneself with holy and unselfish thoughts and feelings must be, upon the whole, a beneficial thing. By many it will be urged that “thoughts are things,” and that to accustom oneself to an “ideal attitude” is not without its advantages. Up to a certain point I am in sympathy with this objector.

So convinced indeed am I that thought-training is essential to everyone, that I would recommend every man to set apart, if it is only a few moments each day, for the express purpose of meditation upon some lofty theme. The value of such blessed moments cannot be over-estimated. But on the other hand, it must not be forgotten that life is not exclusively a question of conscious thought. A

great part of life, the “higher” part of life, is passed consciously. But a still greater part of life passes entirely below the threshold of consciousness; is lived apparently independently of any “consciousness” (in the human sense) altogether.

It will be remembered that, in the third chapter of this book, I showed how enormously “suggestion” influenced practical conduct, and that I pointed out that, as sub-conscious action played an immense part in regulating all those automatic movements which comprise our habits, it was exceedingly necessary to direct these operations from the moral plane of our being. I think that, if we ponder this matter at all closely, we must realize how necessary it becomes to cultivate the *moral attitude* itself as a habit.

People often make one fundamental mistake, and the mistake is this: they imagine that thought can be an end in itself. Thought can never be that. If you think merely in order to think, you have started on the wrong tack altogether. The experience of any practical man will bear me out in this. Ask any man who has proved the utility of an active, industrious career, whether he can afford to live merely in order to think; whether, that is, life has come to mean no more to him than a state wherein he is able to dream upon the visionary speculations of the metaphysicians. I am sure you will find that

he will reply it has come to mean something infinitely more than that. Sometimes, do you know, I almost envy the lot of the man who has no opportunity, no leisure, to think. So much that passes for thought is mere dreaming. At least such a man does not realize the extent of his privation. Whereas, where one philosophizes to excess, one is in danger of losing one's initiative, and becoming a veritable moral paralytic. Too much time by half is devoted to pondering over life, and whenever this becomes an end in itself, we shall find that we entertain a false estimate of life. To live in the true sense must, indeed, mean that one is able to think—and think honestly and clearly at that. Yet to live to any purpose, the thought-factor must not be unduly accentuated. It must enter in naturally. Having sought, so far as one is able, the right object, we must act—we must dare—we must do.

And so, let my last word be this, and I have finished: When you examine yourselves, examine your ideals. Are they worthy of you? Submit them to the test of rigorous, practical experience. Do not scorn to be a realist. Ideals assuredly you must have. You cannot live without them. But do not cheat yourselves into thinking that ideals themselves are sacred, or have any intrinsic value. They have just the value that you choose to give them.

They are worth just what they will fetch. Impossible ideals must be disposed of. They belong to the lumber-room of the soul. Periodically the soul needs cleansing and renovating. A strong will is essential for this. The idols must be broken. The false gods, who no longer reign for the common weal, must go. The true God must be enthroned.

To idealize is only too often a luxury. It must be something more. It must be a necessity. To be profitable, it must be a duty—a duty that has for its object one single fact: the uplifting and ennobling of life.

“So nigh is grandeur to our dust,  
So near is God to man,  
When duty whispers low, *thou must*,  
The youth replies, *I can.*”

Such is Emerson's verdict. Thus is the Divine Ideal identified with the self, which, under the command of the moral consciousness, can execute its behests.

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